

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS****LISTING OF THE CLAIMS**

1. (Currently amended) A method for distributing electronic media content over a network, comprising the steps of:

providing ~~an~~ a predetermined electronic contract for distributing the electronic media content between a retailer and a distributor, wherein terms of the contract are independent of the electronic media content and the retailer distributes the electronic media content to a consumer and the distributor has rights in the electronic media content;

presenting a candidate retail offer for the distribution of the electronic media content to the consumer;

receiving a request from the consumer to exercise the candidate retail offer;

validating the candidate retail offer for the distribution of the electronic media content by accessing the electronic contract and determining if the candidate retail offer is consistent with the electronic contract;

upon successful validation, providing the electronic media content to the consumer;

receiving compensation information from the consumer indicating at least the amount of compensation for the electronic media content provided; and

allocating the compensation according to the electronic contract.

2. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 1, wherein the validating step further comprises the steps of:

referencing, in the electronic contract, one or more terms for electronic distribution of the media content;

comparing the candidate retail offer to the one or more distribution terms; and

validating the candidate retail offer when the candidate retail offer is consistent with the one or more distribution terms.

Claim 3 (Cancelled)

4. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 1, wherein the allocating step further comprises allocating to the retailer a predetermined portion of the compensation according to one or more financial terms in the electronic contract.

5. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 1, wherein the allocating step further comprises allocating to the distributor a predetermined portion of the compensation according to one or more financial terms in the electronic contract.

Claims 6-13 (Cancelled)

14. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 2, wherein the one or more distribution terms comprise contractual terms of agreement for distribution of the electronic media content by the retailer.

15. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 2, wherein the one or more distribution terms comprise contractual terms of agreement for distribution of one or more of a group of electronic media contents by the retailer.

Claim 16 (Canceled)

17. (Currently amended) A method for validating an offer for the distribution of electronic media content by a distributor and retailer over a network, comprising the steps of:

- a. receiving one or more electronic distribution contracts, between the distributor and the retailer, governing the distribution of the media content;
- b. receiving a candidate offer from the retailer;
- c. checking the candidate offer against the one or more electronic distribution contracts upon receiving the candidate offer, wherein the checking step comprises the step of referencing terms of the one or more electronic distribution contracts in a predetermined order; and
- d. sending an indication of validation to the retailer when the candidate offer is determined to be consistent with the one or more electronic contracts.

Claim 18 (Canceled)

Claim 19 (Cancelled)

Claim 20 (Canceled)

21. (Currently Amended) ~~The method as in claim 19, further comprising the steps of: A method for settling a transaction in the course of the distribution of electronic media content from a retailer to a consumer over a network, comprising the steps of:~~

- a. receiving one or more electronic financial contracts from a distributor, each representing one or more terms for settling a transaction, wherein the one or more electronic financial contracts are between the distributor and the retailer;
- b. providing a candidate retail offer for the electronic media content to the consumer;
- c. receiving a request from the consumer to exercise the candidate retail offer for the electronic media content; and
- d. distributing the electronic media content to the consumer;
- e. receiving payment information from the consumer indicating at least the compensation paid for the electronic media content; and
- f. referencing the one or more electronic financial contracts to determine the portion of compensation to be allocated to the distributor.

22. (Cancelled)

23. (Currently amended) An apparatus for validating an offer for the distribution of an electronic media content by a distributor and retailer over a network, comprising:  
a processor; and

a memory in operative connection with the processor for storing processing instructions enabling the processor to:

receive one or more electronic distribution contracts, between a distributor and a retailer, governing the distribution of the media content;

receive a candidate offer from the retailer;

check the candidate offer against the one or more electronic distribution contracts, wherein the checking step comprises the step of referencing terms of the one or more electronic distribution contracts in a predetermined order; and

send an indication of validation to the retailer when the candidate offer is determined to be consistent with the one or more electronic contracts.

24. (Currently amended) An apparatus for settling a transaction in the course of the distribution of an electronic media content from a retailer to a consumer over a network, comprising:

a processor; and

a memory in operative connection with the processor for storing processing instructions enabling the processor to:

receive one or more electronic financial contracts, between a distributor and the retailer, each representing one or more terms for settling a transaction;

distribute the electronic media content to the consumer;

receive payment information from the consumer indicating at least the receipt of compensation paid for the electronic media content; and

reference the one or more electronic financial contracts to determine the portion of compensation to be allocated to the distributor.

25. (Currently amended) A computer readable medium encoded with processing instructions for implementing a method for distributing electronic media content over a network, the method comprising:

providing an electronic contract for distributing the electronic media content between a retailer and a distributor, wherein the retailer distributes the electronic media content to a consumer and the distributor has rights in the electronic media content;

presenting a candidate retail offer for the distribution of the electronic media content to the consumer;

receiving a request from the consumer to exercise the candidate retail offer;

validating the candidate retail offer for the distribution of the electronic media content by accessing the electronic contract upon receipt of the candidate retail offer if the candidate retail offer is consistent with the electronic contract;

upon successful validation, providing the electronic media content to the consumer;

receiving payment information from the consumer indicating at least the amount of compensation for the electronic media content provided; and

allocating the compensation according to the electronic contract.

26. (Currently Amended) A computer readable medium encoded with processing instructions for implementing a method for validating an offer for the distribution of electronic media content by a distributor and retailer over a network, the method comprising:

receiving one or more electronic distribution contracts, between the distributor and the retailer, governing the distribution of the media content;

receiving a candidate offer from the retailer;

checking the candidate offer against the one or more electronic distribution contracts, wherein the checking step comprises the step of referencing terms of the one or more electronic distribution contracts in a predetermined order; and

sending an indication of validation to the retailer when the candidate offer is determined to be consistent with the one or more electronic contracts.

27. (Currently Amended) A computer readable medium encoded with processing instructions for implementing a method for settling a transaction in the course of the distribution of an electronic media content from a retailer to a consumer over a network, the method comprising:

receiving one or more electronic financial contracts, between a distributor and the retailer, each representing one or more terms for settling a transaction;

distributing the electronic media content from ~~the~~ a central location to the consumer;

receiving payment information from the consumer indicating at least the compensation paid for the electronic media content; and

referencing the one or more electronic financial contracts to determine the portion of compensation to be allocated to the distributor.

28. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 1, further comprising:  
providing the electronic contract at a central location;  
receiving the request from the consumer at the central location; and  
receiving the payment information at the central location.

29. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 1, further comprising:  
dynamically updating the electronic contract; and  
applying the electronic contract to the distribution of the electronic media content only after receiving the request from the consumer.

30. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 2, further comprising:  
dynamically updating the distribution terms; and  
referencing the one or more distribution terms only after receiving the request from the consumer.

31. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 17, wherein the predetermined order indicates a hierarchical relationship between the one or more electronic contracts.

32. (Previously presented) The method of claim 17, further comprising:  
receiving the electronic distribution contracts at a central location; and  
receiving the candidate offer at the central location.

33. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 17, further comprising:  
dynamically updating the one or more electronic distribution contracts; and  
referencing the terms of the one or more electronic distribution contracts only after receiving  
a request from a consumer.

34. (Previously presented) The method of claim 19, further comprising:  
receiving the electronic financial contracts at a central location; and  
distributing the electronic media content from the central location.

35. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 19, further comprising:  
dynamically updating the one or more electronic financial contracts; and  
referencing the one or more electronic financial contracts only after receiving a request from  
a consumer.

36. (Previously presented) The apparatus as in claim 22, wherein the processor is further  
enabled to:  
provide the electronic contract at a central location;  
receive the request from the consumer at the central location; and  
receive the payment information at the central location.

37. (Previously presented) The apparatus as in claim 23, wherein the predetermined order indicates a hierarchical relationship between the one or more electronic contracts.

38. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 25, further comprising:  
providing the electronic contract at a central location;  
receiving the request from the consumer at the central location; and  
receiving the payment information at the central location.

39. (Previously presented) The method as in claim 26, wherein the predetermined order indicates a hierarchical relationship between the one or more electronic contracts.

40. (Currently Amended) A method for distributing physical media content, comprising the steps of:

providing an electronic contract for distributing the media content between a retailer and a distributor, wherein the retailer distributes the physical media content to a consumer and the distributor has rights in the media content;

presenting a candidate retail offer for the distribution of the physical media content to the consumer;

receiving a request from the consumer to exercise the candidate retail offer;

validating the candidate retail offer for the distribution of the physical media content, upon receipt of the request, if the candidate retail offer is consistent with the electronic contract;

upon successful validation, distributing the physical media content to the consumer;

receiving payment information from the consumer indicating at least the amount of compensation for the physical media content distributed; and  
allocating the compensation according to the electronic contract.

41. (Previously presented) The method of claim 40, wherein the physical media content is a digital versatile disk.

42. (Currently Amended) A method for distributing content over a network, comprising the steps of:

providing a first electronic contract for distributing the content between a first value chain participant and a second value chain participant;

receiving a request from the second value chain participant for the delivery of the content from the first value chain participant;

comparing the request to the first electronic contract, upon receiving the request;

validating the request if the request is consistent with the first electronic contract; and

upon successful validation, delivering the content to the second value chain participant.

43. (Previously presented) The method of claim 42, further comprising the steps:

providing a second electronic contract for distributing the content between the first value chain participant and the second value chain participant;

comparing the request to the second electronic contract;

validating the request if the request is consistent with the second electronic contract; and

upon successful validation, delivering the content to the second value chain participant.

44. (Previously presented) The method of claim 43 wherein the first electronic contract is stored at a same network location as the second electronic contract.

45. (Previously presented) The method of claim 43 wherein the first electronic contract is stored at a different network location as the second electronic contract.

46. (Previously presented) A method for distributing content over a network, comprising the steps of:

providing a first electronic contract for distributing the content between a first value chain participant and a second value chain participant;

receiving a request from the second value chain participant to distribute the content to a third value chain participant;

comparing the request to the first electronic contract;

validating the request if the request is consistent with the first electronic contract; and

upon successful validation, permitting the delivery the content to the third value chain participant.

47. (Previously presented) The method of claim 46, further comprising the steps of:

upon successful transaction, compensating the first value chain participant according to the electronic contract.

48. (Previously presented) The method of claim 47, further comprising the steps of: upon successful transaction, compensating the second value chain participant according to the electronic contract.

49. (Withdrawn) A method for distributing content over a network, comprising the steps of:

providing a first electronic contract for distributing the content between a first value chain participant and a second value chain participant;

transmitting a handle identifying the content from the second value chain participant to a third value chain participant;

accessing, by the third value chain participant, the handle to request the content from the first value chain participant;

comparing the request to the first electronic contract;

validating the request if the request is consistent with the first electronic contract; and

upon successful validation, delivering the content to the third value chain participant.

50. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 49, further comprising the steps of:

upon successful transaction, compensating the first value chain participant according to the electronic contract.

51. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 50, further comprising the steps of:

upon successful transaction, compensating the second value chain participant according to the electronic contract.

52. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 49, wherein the first electronic contract includes contractual terms of agreement including at least one of how many times the content was distributed between value chain participants, a date since an original release of the content and a date since a certain transaction; further comprising the steps of:

transmitting a handle identifying the content from the third value chain participant to a fourth value chain participant, wherein the handle identifies at least one of how many times it was distributed between value chain participants, a date since the original release of the content, a date since the transaction by the third value chain participant;

accessing the handle, by the fourth value chain participant, to make a second request the content from the first value chain participant;

comparing the second request to the first electronic contract;

validating the second request if the second request is consistent with the first electronic contract; and

upon successful validation, delivering the content to the fourth value chain participant.

53. (Withdrawn) The method of claim 49, further comprising the steps of:

upon successful transaction, compensating the first value chain participant according to the electronic contract and based on at least one of the times the content was distributed between value

chain participants, the date since the original release of the content, and since the transaction by the third value chain participant.

54. (Withdrawn) A method for distributing content over a network, comprising the steps of:

providing a first electronic contract for distributing the content in a first territory between a first value chain participant and a second value chain participant wherein both the first and the second value chain participants are located in the first territory;

transmitting a handle identifying the content from the second value chain participant to a third value chain participant wherein the third value chain participant is located in a second territory;

accessing the handle to request the content from the first value chain participant;

comparing the request to the first electronic contract;

determining that the first value chain participant cannot distribute the content in the second territory;

accessing a second electronic contract for distributing the content in the second territory by a fourth value chain participant;

validating the request if the request is consistent with the second electronic contract; and

upon successful validation, delivering the content to the third value chain participant from the fourth value chain participant.

55. (New) A method for distributing electronic media content over a network, comprising the steps of:

identifying an electronic contract for distributing the electronic media content between a retailer and a distributor, wherein the retailer distributes the electronic media content to a consumer and the distributor has rights in the electronic media content;

receiving, from a consumer, a request to accept a candidate retail offer for access to the electronic media content;

accessing the electronic contract upon receipt of the request;

comparing the candidate retail offer to the electronic contract;

validating the candidate retail offer if the candidate retail offer is consistent with the electronic contract;

upon successful validation, allowing the consumer to access the electronic media content;

receiving, from the consumer, at least compensation for the access to the electronic media content; and

determining the allocation of the compensation according to the electronic contract.

56. (New) The method of claim 55, wherein the identifying, accessing, comparing and validating steps are performed by a reference server.

57. (New) The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of packing general contract terms with the electronic media content.